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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD

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SUBJECT: ANTI-WEST, ANTI-ISRAEL AD MAKES ROUNDS OF LOCAL PAPERS

1. (U) SUMMARY: A virulently anti-West, anti-Israel advertisement calling on good Muslims to fight to defend the Quran and their faith appeared in two of Kuwait's five Arabic daily papers on three consecutive days this week. The ad, placed at considerable expense by an individual Kuwaiti said to support extremist causes, has stirred fears that it could incite violence and provoked a strong response from media analysts and columnists and government action against the papers that ran the ad. END SUMMARY.

"It Promotes Terrorism, I Really Believe it Does"

2. (SBU) PD contacts and columnists were quick to condemn the ad, which is seemingly a response to false news reports of the desecration of the Quran by U.S. soldiers at Guantanamo Bay. Sami Al-Nisf, a columnist and the media advisor to Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, told IO, "I don't know why a newspaper will accept this. They'll print anything." Al-Nisf said that the ad was a dangerous incitement to impressionable youth. "A young boy will read it. He will be provoked," Al-Nisf said. "He will look negatively at the U.S., even the Kuwaiti government, that it didn't act against somebody humiliating the Quran."

3. (SBU) An official at the Ministry of Information was equally concerned about the impact of the advertisement. "Absolutely, 100 percent, it can provoke violence," the official said. "It promotes hatred. It promotes terrorism, I really believe it does. Every single sentence in there is talking about hatred, the defeat of the enemy."

4. (U) Writing in Arabic daily Al-Watan on August 9, Liberal Columnist Nabil Al-Fadhel absolves the newspapers of blame for publishing the ad, arguing that they are businesses, but excoriates the man behind the ad, a Kuwaiti businessman and Islamist extremist named Fuad Al-Refai. Al-Fadhel writes: "Does not this barking Muslim know that to publicly disgrace the star of David, the symbol of the people of Israel and their prophet Moses, and the Cross of Jesus - which was thankfully deleted from the ad by the publishers - is considered a stupid act which will give others reason to disgrace our Quran, throw it in toilets, and publish the photos on the satellites? Does this fanatic think that he insulted Israel with his ad? With this idiotic ad he has insulted Islam."

"You are the Party of Satan"

5. (U) The advertisement, which appeared as the entire back page of Arabic daily Al-Rai Al-Aam on August 7, in the same spot in Al-Seyassah on August 8, and again, in a smaller, text-only version in Al-Rai Al-Aam on August 9, depicts a medieval Islamic warrior, armed with a bow, arrows, and a large scimitar. Pictured from behind, he is carrying a red banner and a black book, under the words "Oh, Quran . They disgrace it!! Whose day is it now???" in bloody black script. The banner has Quranic verses reading: "You are the Party of Satan;" "The Party of Satan are the Losers;" "The Enemies of God and His Prophet are Disgraceful;" and "The Words of the Disbelievers are Insignificant." The book is held open, and the front and back covers, facing the viewer, read, "The Holy book;" "Disbelievers are unclean." On the warrior's quiver is written, "Our soldiers will defeat them." On his sword are the words, "That day the believers will be delighted by God's victory."

6. (U) The warrior is standing, facing a setting sun, in a desert landscape littered with broken flags that appear to be the flags of Israel, Germany, the Soviet Union, and England, as well as a version of the U.S. flag with a star of David superimposed over the field of stars. Inset in the lower left corner of the illustration is a picture of a toilet with what appear to be the Israeli, U.S., and Soviet flags crammed into the bowl, an obvious reference to Quran desecrations alleged to have occurred at Guantanamo Bay. Two more stars of David are drawn on the tile floor of the bathroom. An inscription on the raised toilet seat says, "All of these people are Kufar [non-believers]." At the

bottom of the ad is another line of bloody black script reading, "Oh Mua'tisem..." This is a reference to the Umayyad period of early Islamic history, when a group of Muslims were threatened and issued a plea for help to Mua'tisem, a ruler of that era.

17. (U) Text at the bottom of the ad says that posters of the ad's image are available "for the price of a prayer from a good Muslim." The text lists phone (535-0782/3), cell (979-7132), and fax (535-0781) numbers, and encourages those who obtain the poster to display in a clean place, since it bears the name of Allah. Calls to the numbers were answered by an Egyptian who identified himself as "Abu Ibrahim," who gave the address of a house in the Qurtoba neighborhood of Kuwait City.

18. (U) A senior editor at one of the papers that ran the ad said that the version that appeared in the paper was considerably sanitized. He said the paper changed the colors of the American flag to obscure the reference -- it is blue and red with no white stripes in one depiction, and has green and red stripes in another -- and removed a cross that had been pictured jammed in the toilet. The editor said that the ad, while distasteful, was legal. He said that the back page of the paper costs 5,000 KD (about \$18,000).

A Wealthy Businessman, and the "Most Extreme of the Extremists"

19. (SBU) The editor and other PAS contacts confirmed that the man who purchased the ad is Fuad Al-Refai, a Kuwaiti businessman in his mid-fifties. Characterized by contacts as both "a wealthy businessman" and "a nut," the contacts agreed that Al-Refai has a long record as an exceedingly extreme Islamist. According to contacts, Al-Refai was a playboy in his younger days who began subscribing to an extreme brand of Islam in the late 1970s, after experiencing a troubling dream. Two contacts said that they understood that Al-Refai had once been detained by Saudi security services there, and another said that in the 1990s, weapons had been found on his farm in Wafra, a rural region of Kuwait. The editor said that Al-Refai periodically distributed Islamist cassette tapes and had previously purchased religious-themed advertisements. Media Advisor Al-Nisf said, "He's a bad guy, definitely. There's no limit to what this guy will do. He's one of the most extreme of the extremists."

"We Will Not See This Again"

10. (SBU) Contacts confirmed that the Government was moving to punish the papers that ran the advertisement. Media Advisor Al-Nisf said that the Prime Minister expressed his displeasure with the ad at the August 7 meeting of the Council of Ministers. Al-Nisf noted that just last month, the Prime Minister hosted all editors-in-chief for a special meeting at which he instructed them to moderate their coverage so as not to enflame sectarian tension.

11. (U) Both Al-Nisf and an official at the Ministry of Information said that the Minister of Information was "mad" and that he is preparing criminal cases against both Al-Rai Al-Aam and Al-Seyassah, the papers that ran the ad. Kuwaiti press law makes it illegal for newspapers to incite sectarian strife and to damage Kuwait's relations with friendly nations. While the law does not define what exactly constitutes a violation of these laws, they are the statutes under which the papers could be prosecuted. "Everybody should know that this is not acceptable," Al-Nisf said. "We will not see this again."

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